

## **Historic, Archive Document**

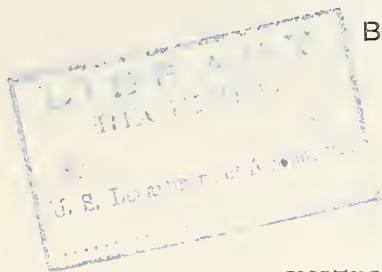
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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
BUREAU OF BIOLOGICAL SURVEY




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INSTRUCTIONS FOR TAKING A BIRD CENSUS.

A preliminary bird census was made during the summer of 1914, and the results were so satisfactory that it is desired to repeat the work for the summer of 1915. It is hoped that a much larger number of censuses may be taken the present season, especially in the South and the West, whence a comparatively small number of reports were received in 1914. These censuses will serve as a basis for determining what effect, if any, the present State and Federal laws have on the increase of game and insectivorous birds. Each person receiving this circular is invited to aid in the work by taking a census of the birds breeding this summer on some area or areas selected to represent fairly the average farm conditions, but without much woodland. It should not be less than 40 acres—a quarter of a mile square—nor more than 80 acres, and should include the farm buildings, with the usual shade trees, orchards, etc., as well as fields of plowed land and of pasture or meadow.

The area should be selected not only with reference to the present summer's work, but should, if possible, be chosen so that the physical conditions will not be much changed for several years; if succeeding annual censuses show changes in the bird population, it will be known that they are not due to changed environment.

What is wanted is a census of the pairs of birds actually nesting within the selected area. Birds that visit the area for feeding purposes should not be counted, no matter how close their nests are to the boundary lines.

It is practically impossible to take this census on the scale of 40 to 80 acres in a single day. A plan which has been used with advantage for several years is to begin at daylight some morning the last of May or the first week in June and zigzag back and forth across the area, counting the male birds. Early in the morning at that season every male bird should be in full song and easily counted, and, since migration is ended and the birds are settled in their summer quarters, each male can safely be taken to represent a breeding pair.

The census of one day should be checked and revised by several days of further work, in order to insure that each bird seen is actually nesting within the area and to make certain that no species has been overlooked.

The height of the breeding season should be chosen for this work. In the latitude of Washington—latitude 39°—May 30 is about the proper date for the original census. In the latitude of Boston the work should not begin for a week later, while south of Washington an earlier date should be selected.

The final results of the census should be sent to this bureau about June 30, and should be accompanied by a statement of the exact boundaries of the selected area, defined so explicitly that it will be possible 25 years hence to have the census repeated. The name of the present owner of the land should be given, together with a careful description of its character, including a statement whether the area is dry upland or moist bottom land; the number of acres in each of the principal crops, or in permanent meadow, pasture, orchard, swamp, roads, etc.; the kind of fencing used, and whether there is much or little brush along any fences, roads, or streams, or in the permanent pasture.

If there is an isolated piece of woodland conveniently near and comprising 10 to 20 acres we should like to have a separate census made of the birds nesting therein. In which case the report, in addition to the size and exact boundaries of the wooded tract, should state the principal kinds of trees and whether there is much or little undergrowth.

Still a third census desired is that of some definite timbered area—as 40 acres, for instance—forming a part of a much larger tract of timber, either deciduous or evergreen. While the number of birds on such an area would be far less than on an equal area of mixed farm land, their correct enumeration will require considerably more care and time.

The above are three kinds of bird censuses considered desirable, and it is hoped that many persons interested in our bird life will take one or more of them this season. As the Department has no funds to pay for this work, we must depend wholly on voluntary observers.

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